The Love of the One for the Many and the Many for the One

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Abstract

The philosophical "problem" of the *one* and the *many* that has occupied philosophers since Parmenides is also about love and the metaphysical foundations of authorship. In the *Parmenides* Plato takes up this discussion of the *one* and the *many*, leading to the most paradoxical conclusions, such as that the *one* is always becoming older and younger than itself at the same time. To defend Parmenides, Plato has Zeno of Elea propose the thesis that the one can be divided *ad infinitum*. Therefore, the *one* cannot be divided at all. For the poet, the paradox of the *one* and the *many* is conquered through the concept of being *nothing*. The authorial nothingness that the author is interested in willfully achieving involves the simultaneous unity and fragmentation of the author's authorial voice. The author seeks to represent multiplicity and unity simultaneously; which is to say, the author seeks a vision of the one through the many and the many through the one. The simultaneous love of the one for the many and the many for the one describes the self-reflective artistic act.

Keywords: the *one* and the *many*, Shakespeare's tenth muse, the will to nothing, time and eternity, the poet´s hands´ self-reflection

> One who sees the unity of things is dialectical.
>
> Plato, the Republic (VII 537c)

> Every good has the power of uniting its participants, and every union is good; and The Good is the same as The One.
>
> Proclus, *Metaphysical Elements* (Proposition XIII)

In what follows, I will look at the philosophical problem of the *one* and the *many* from the point of view of the artist or author.

The problem of the *one* and the *many* that has occupied philosophers since Parmenides is of central concern to our discussion because it sets the *one* and the *many* (and hence being and becoming) in opposition to each other, only to claim that such oppositions cannot logically co-exist. In fact, according to Parmenides and to the Neoplatonic philosophers who spoke about his doctrine of the indivisible One or The Good, existence itself could not be attributed to the One. Discussions of this nature isolate oneness from multiplicity, being, and even unity since nothing at all can be attributed to a completely self-sufficient whole, not even self-reflection. I should rephrase the words "nothing at all" to "nothing above all", since it would be for the concept of nothing that oneness would have a way of becoming many, that is, by willing its own absence.

When I began this study several years ago, such a concept of oneness appeared incomprehensible to me, and I chose to discuss oneness in a way that was reconcilable with unity, being, and multiplicity. However, I have subsequently grown unsure about whether we can entirely discount Parmenides´ idea of oneness and some of its corresponding paradoxes, especially in light of Shakespeare´s invoking of the "tenth Muse" in his *Sonnets*, which assigns the central task of authorship to the role of being or willing nothing.

When Plato takes up the discussion of the *one* and the *many* in the *Parmenides* it leads to paradoxical conclusions (if any kind of change to its nature is permitted), such as that the *one* is always becoming older and younger than itself at the same time. To defend Parmenides, Plato has Zeno of Elea propose the thesis that if the *one* were dividable, its divisions or multiples could carry on *ad infinitum*. Therefore, the *one* cannot be divided at all. "If all things are one", says Parmenides, "that one of which existence is posited would be without *parts*, limitless, and therefore would be *nothing*."

According to Parmenides´ first hypothesis, not only is oneness not reconcilable with multiplicity or being, but it is also nameless, unsayable and unknowable. Nevertheless, the interlocutors in Plato´s dialogue eventually find a way of talking about oneness as reconcilable with multiplicity. Later philosophers such as Plotinus (1956), Proclus, and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite would expand this initial idea of the indivisible one, making it central to their understanding of divinity and the problem of how the many emanated from the one.

From the artist's or author's point of view (assuming that the artist can be talked about as being one person), where does the desire to multiply come from? Also, at what stage does the one decide that it must multiply to exist? Or that it requires multiplication for self-fulfilment? In what way is "to become many" to *love many*, especially if the many are parts emanating out of oneself? Is artistic creation a form of self-love or self-reflection? In this latter sense, it would appear as

though the love of the other were another way of looking at the love of oneself. An entirely self-contained one, on the other hand, would have no reason to multiply.

According to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, "the procession of things from, and their reversion to, the One … can be understood as intertwined, simultaneous, and co-eternal 'moments' of the same cosmic reality, whereby a given thing oscillates, or spirals, between unity and multiplicity." (Carrasquillo, 2013, p. 207, 211)

Dionysius maintains that it is the divine *eros* which causes the One to emanate outside of itself "the divine *eros* is ecstatic; it does not permit any to be lovers of themselves but of those which they love." Through this *eros*, the One comes out from "within" itself, ecstatically shooting forth outside of itself, differentiating itself into many, thus giving being to the world: (Carrasquillo, 2013, p. 214)

Pseudo-Dionysius' triadic structure of causation, consisting of

> abiding, procession, and reversion (*monê*, *prodos*, *epistrophê*) […] shows how the Good *abides* in itself, *proceeds* out of itself into creation, and *reverts back* into itself [w]ithin the context of the reversion of all things to the One. (Carrasquillo, 2013, p. 211)

In Plato's *Symposium*, the prophetess Diotima of Mantinea describes the motives behind the desire of the *one* to become *many* as the innate human impulse to achieve immortality:

> The mortal nature is seeking as far as is possible to be everlasting and immortal: and this is only to be attained by generation, because generation always leaves behind a new existence in the place of the old. Nay even in the life of the same individual there is succession and not absolute unity: a man is called the same, and yet in the short interval which elapses between youth and age, and manhood which every animal is said to have life and identity, he is undergoing a perpetual process of loss and reparation... Marvel not then at the love which all men have of their offspring; for that universal love and interest is for the sake of immortality. (Plato, 2008, 207-208)

Above all, the *one* wants to divide itself up, to procreate, to tell its story, to maintain its memory beyond time and space: in short, to become immortal. In exchange for losing its initial Absolute oneness, the one is banking on the immortality of its parts. To embrace authorial nothingness, the author moves beyond being and becoming or the one and the many (in the usual sense), by presenting both at the same time. To achieve his goal, the artist becomes invisible. According to the French novelist Gustave Flaubert,

> The artist must be in his work as God is in creation, invisible and all-powerful; one must sense him everywhere but never see him. (Flaubert, 1980, p. 230).

Neither may we forget that the representation of the artist's invisible voice originates by way of the artist´s invisible hands. In effect, the author writes his character´s voices into existence. Meanwhile, the invisible hands of the artist remain removed from his artwork.

Fig. 1 Vincent van Gogh, *The Potato Eaters* 1885, oil on canvas, 82 cm x 114 cm, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation).

In Vincent Van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters* (1885), the artist presents us with five characters, one with her back to the viewer. All five characters, except the younger one with her back to us, can be seen eating and drinking with their right hand. The subject of the painting is the artist's invisible hands expressed through the visible hands of the peasants eating around the table, and the invisible hands of the artist himself, symbolically represented by the person at the table whose hands we cannot see. They are five around the table to emphasise that they are part of *one* hand together: the artist´s hand.

A similar analogy can be found in Pier Paolo Pasolini's film *Teorema* (1968) where a mysterious unnamed visitor to an affluent Italian household can be viewed as a symbolic representation of the artist in relation to his characters. His visit to their home in Milan brings the entire household to life. Moreover, his erotic encounters with each of them inspire the opening of each of their hands to the mysterious powers of self-discovery, including both creative and self-destructive powers. The visitor brings these powers to the characters as an author brings his characters to life. When he leaves their home and disappears from their lives, their hands, which had formally been activated with a creative spirit, turn in upon themselves. The characters cannot exist without their author. Pasolini connects the hand to *eros* by revealing the connection between (physical) love and the hand; the opening of the hand symbolising the liberation of subjectivity through self-reflective love. Pasolini's film can be viewed as an attempt to isolate the hand's capacity for the expansion and retraction of subjectivity within the sphere of *eros.*

Just as his love and presence brought them to life, when the visitor leaves, the characters lose their sense of self and melt back into oblivion: the

youngest daughter Odette clenching her fists in despair until her spiritless body is taken away to a mental hospital; the father undressing himself naked in a crowded train station; the maid burying herself alive; the mother engaging in indiscriminate sex with strangers who resemble the guest; and the son psychotically painting his desire for the absent guest. The characters in Pasolini's film exist only in connection to the visitor, which is to say, to their author. The author, being his characters´ creator, exemplifies the idea that the *one* loves the *many* (evidenced by the visitor making love to each of his characters). Meanwhile, the love of the *many* for the *one* is illustrated by the characters´ need for the visitor's presence in their otherwise empty (non-existent) lives.

In Fernando Pessoa´s poetry, the flight from the *one* subject or author into the form of his *many* names or heteronyms is psychologically inspired by a philosophy more akin to Heraclitus than Parmenides, who said that reality is both one *and* many. In his notebooks, Pessoa wrote:

> All things changing, says Heraclitus, no knowledge is possible. My answer is that all things changing, myself change with them, and so am in relative stability. Subject and object changing perpetually are the stable ones in relation to the other. (Pessoa, 1968, p. 113)

Pessoa is concerned not only with a view of human agency as changeable but with the expansion of subjectivity itself to include multiplicity. In this manner, Pessoa reflects not only the Greek philosophers but also the American poet Walt Whitman, who in *Leaves of Grass* writes:

> Very well then. I contradict myself
> (I am large, I contain multitudes). (1958, p. 96)

In one of his poems, Pessoa writes:

> Não sei quantas almas tenho.
> Cada momento mudei.
> Continuamente me estranho.
> Nunca me vi nem achei.
> De tanto ser, só tenho alma.
> Quem tem alma não tem calma.
> Quem vê é só o que vê,
> Quem sente não é quem é,
> Atento ao que eu sou e vejo,
> Torno-me eles e não eu. (Pessoa, 2008, p. 268)
>
> [I don´t know how many souls I have.
> I changed at every moment.
> I always feel self-estranged.
> I´ve never seen or found myself
> From being so much, I have only soul.
> A man who has soul has no calm.
> A man who sees is just what he sees
> A man who feels is not who he is.
> Attentive to what I am and see,
> I become them and stop being I.

On another occasion, Pessoa writes:

> Assim eu me acomodo
> Com o que Deus criou,
> Deus tem diverso modo
> Diversos modos sou.
> Assim a Deus imito,
> Que quando fez o que é
> Tirou-lhe o infinito
> E a unidade até. (2008, p. 273)
>
> [I´ve learned to adopt my self
> To the world God has made.
> His mode of being is different:
> My being has different modes.
> Thus I imitate God,
> Who when he made what is
> Took from it the infinite
> And even its unity.]

With Pessoa, we witness the metaphysical transformation of the *one* into the *many*. Pessoa's projected multiplicities involve the realisation that both pure infinity and pure unity were taken from the world in order to allow it to exist.

In *Richard II,* Shakespeare uses the concept of *nothing* to unassert his own authorial identity. Only by becoming nothing is he able to become many. At the end of a long soliloquy, the imprisoned King states:

> Thus play I in one person many people,
> And none contented: sometimes am I king;
> Then treasons make me wish myself a beggar,
> And so I am: then crushing penury
> Persuades me I was better when a king;
> Then am I king'd again: and by and by
> Think that I am unking'd by Bolingbroke,
> And straight am *nothing*: but whate'er I be,
> Nor I nor any man that but man is
> With nothing shall be pleased, till he be eased
> With being nothing. (Shakespeare, 1988, Richard II, V, 5, vv. 31-40, p. 393)

This passage reveals the playwright´s art of playing many different parts, and the psychology underlying the author´s authorial identity. Shakespeare, in effect, is showing us how he wills his own nothing.

By representing the state of mind before the creation of multiplicities, nothing originates the act of parting.

In Sonnet 8, Shakespeare writes:

> In singleness the parts that thou shouldst bear;

> Mark how one string, sweet husband to another,
>
> Strikes each in each by mutual ordering,
>
> Resembling sire, and child, and happy mother,
>
> Who all in one, one pleasing note do sing:
>
> Whose speechless song being many, seeming one,
>
> Sings this to thee: 'Thou single wilt prove none.' (1988, Sonnet 8, vv. 8-14, p. 752)

The final couplet says the opposite of what it means explicitly. "Thou single" refers to *one* and *will* ("single wilt") while "prove none" refers to the concept of *nothing*. In other words, "who all in one […] being many, seeming one" refers to Shakespeare´ one (1) and none (0) together giving birth to the many. Shakespeare's "tenth Muse" is his way of becoming nothing. In sonnet 38, Shakespeare writes:

> Be thou the tenth Muse, ten times more in worth
>
> Than those old nine which rhymers invocate;
>
> And he that calls on thee, let him bring forth
>
> Eternal numbers to outlive long date. (1988, vv. 9-12, p. 755)

In Sonnet 10, Shakespeare writes:

> Grant, if thou wilt, thou art beloved of many,
>
> But that thou none lov'st is most evident: (1988, vv. 3-4, p. 752)

Shakespeare makes it possible for the reader to read his sonnets vicariously on many levels; most obviously because his name is Will. He is proposing that you too will become will. "If thou wilt" (that is, if you too would be will), "thou (too would be) beloved of many". In fact, you too will be beloved but love none. This goes back to the idea of willing nothing as a way of begetting the many.

One might read Shakespeare´s procreation sequence of sonnets as a concentrated attempt to reveal the nature of the dramatist's task, and what fuels the poet's calling and inspiration to write his plays. Above all, it has to do with overcoming Time, the principal enemy of the poet in the *Sonnets*.

The tenth muse is Shakespeare's aesthetics' of parting. In effect, through the author´s *will* to *nothing* or "tenth Muse" (equating 1 with *will*, and 0 with *nothing*), the number *one* or *will* is juxtaposed with *zero* (or *nothing*) to create a kind of aesthetic eroticism symbolised by the number 10.

The *one* (and by *one* I mean the authorial unity or authorship) loves or *wills nothing* the same way the *one* loves multiplicity. It may be helpful to look at Keats´ definition of the poetical character to see how *nothing* relates to multiplicity from the point of view of the author. "The poetical character", according to Keats:

> Is not itself – it has no self – it is everything and nothing – it has no character – it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated – it has as much delight in an Iago as an Imogen (*Cymbeline*). What shocks the virtuous philosopher delights the Chameleon Poet […]. [A poet] has no identity – he is continually in for - and filling some other Body.
>
> Men of genius are as great as certain ethereal chemicals operating on the Mass of neutral intellect – but they have not any individuality, any determined Character. (2009, p. 52, p. 194)

While Keats´s notion of the poetical character (often referred to as "negative capability") reminds us of the authorial nothingness at the heart of authorship, out of which the many parts created are merely parts played, I want to suggest something a bit more ordinary: that the multiplicity of parts is anchored in the character of the reader whose role is nothing less than to perform the resurrection of the writer. The reader's part is the immortalising part.

Like the universe at large, the text or artwork must be expandable through the future reader to survive time. The relationship between the poet and the reader is such that the poet allows his poetry to be shared by the reader as a kind of surrogate self, wherein both the reader and author are given new life. The reader is given new life in another way too, in taking on the role of the redeemer of the poet´s verse, fulfilling the prophecy of being the poet´s "better part". Meanwhile, the poet is given new life by having his poems or plays brought back to life by the reader.

In the "Phoenix and the Turtle" (Shakespeare, 1988, p. 782), two lovers celebrate a ritual transformation into one. Could it be that the birds symbolise the author´s and reader´s joint enterprise to overcome time through the perpetual immolation of their loving embrace? When the author and reader became one, the text survives forever.

Shakespeare's nothing is precisely that which makes room for multiplicity and presence. It is similar to the Pythagorean need for a void to reproduce number. It is a nothing which allows for the motion of will.

The one, desiring to become many, resigns itself to being nothing.

Nothing (sees itself) as expanding through its love of will. By perpetually becoming many, nothing remains without statehood or personal identity. The identity-less hero is both author and reader and neither.

The authorial nothingness expanding in every direction beyond distinction refuses to be itself. Nothing will have no foundation in space or time, and consequently, will "bring forth/Eternal numbers to outlive long date." (Shakespeare, 1988, Sonnet 38, vv. 11-12, p. 755).

In Shakespeare's early sonnets, self-love is regarded as selfish and narcissistic folly. The writer urges the reader to share himself. The best and most worthy kind of love bears fruit. The answer to

the charge of narcissism is the willful fragmentation of the self: "To live a second life on second head" (1988, Sonnet 68, v. 7, p. 759), by recreating oneself through bearing children, writing poetry or making art.

It is with his "tenth Muse" that Shakespeare tells us he shall outlive time. The tenth muse also refers to the poet´s hands. In his *Sonnets,* the word "hand" often alludes to the hand of Time, for example, in the verses:

> Then let not winter's ragged hand deface,
>
> In thee thy summer, ere thou be distilled. (1988, Sonnet 6, vv. 1-2, p. 751)

or

> Against my love shall be as I am now,
>
> With time's injurious hand crushed and o'erworn; (1988, Sonnet 63, vv. 1-2, p. 758).

Though the word "hand" often appears in this capacity, it also implies the opposite of what Shakespeare means by Time. For example, Shakespeare writes: "Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?" (Sonnet 63, v. 11, p. 759), speculating as to the existence or absence of a hand powerful enough to hold Time back. Alternatively,

> Nay, if you read this line, remember not
>
> The hand that writ it; (Sonnet 71, vv. 5-6, p. 759)

to remind us of the invisible absent hand of the poet.

While oneness is above and beyond number, plurality begins with one and nothing. Willing nothingness into multiplicity with his hands´ self-reflective initiative, the poet reveals the process of artistic creation leading to immortality.

The human psychology behind multiplication is the desire to create a lasting legacy in one´s image. One might also create a legacy in one´s non-image. To make oneself into multiples, to divide oneself up requires the will to become nothing.

The first stage is to find a way to multiply oneself, to divide oneself up into parts; for example, to create sons or sonnets or characters. In Sonnet 3, Shakespeare writes: "Now is the time that face should form another," (v. 2, p. 751). The poet's goal is not only to express the self's multitudinous, contradictory nature but to create an inner space wherein such multitudinous divisions can be willfully developed and projected. Indeed, love itself requires division!

> Let me confess that we two must be twain,
>
> Although our undivided loves are one; (Sonnet 36, vv. 1-2, p. 755)

When one draws near to oneself, one becomes multiple. These different multiples or *parts* — having their source of life in the poet, speak to the poet's imaginative leap into multiplicity.

One increases and decreases at the same time. One grows older and younger at the same time. One disappears, and at the same time, one appears. One forgets at the same time as one remembers. One moves forwards, and at the same time, one moves backwards.

Art is the self-reflective act of this simultaneous love. It is the love or will to nothing.

The great circle of causation is how all things emanate from the non-existent artist.

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